

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 0034

CARACAS FOR DEA

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TAGS: SNAR CO

SUBJ: GOC EXPECTATIONS OF US NARCOTICS AID (HELICOPTERS)

REF: A. STATE 303172; AND B) BOGOTA 10609

1. SUMMARY. FOLLOWING ARE INTERIM COMMENTS ON POINTS RAISED REFTEL A; THEY INCLUDE UP-DATED STATUS OF INTERNAL GOC DISCUSSIONS ON REORGANIZATION OF ITS NARCOTICS EFFORT, AND MISSION'S VIEWS ON QUESTIONS OF INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES AND THE ROLE OF AIR TRANSPORT IN THE TOTAL COLOMBIAN INTERDICTION EFFORT. EXPERIENCE SO FAR WITH OPERATION KITCHEN CONVINCES US THAT IMPROVED AIR TRANSPORT--AND SPECIFICALLY HELICOPTERS--ARE IMPORTANT TO THE OVERALL DRUG ENFORCEMENT EFFORT HERE. OUR CONVERSATIONS WITH RANKING GOC OFFICIALS INDICATE THAT THEY BELIEVE LIKEWISE. MORE-OVER, THESE OFFICIALS, UP TO AND INCLUDING PRESIDENT LOPEZ, ARE CONVINCED THAT THEY HAVE A US COMMITMENT TO SUPPLY HELICOPTERS. END SUMMARY.

2. REGORANIZATION: INTERNAL DISCUSSIONS IN THE GOC SPEARHEADED BY THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, JUSTICE AND DEFENSE CONTINUE. THE MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS TOLD THE AMBASSADOR TWO WEEKS AGO THAT INTERNAL STAFF STUDIES WERE BEING UNDERTAKEN, AND
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THAT HE EXPECTED TO BE ABLE TO INFORM THE AMBASSADOR SHORTLY

AFTER THE HOLIDAY SEASON ENDS WHAT DECISIONS WILL BE TAKEN AND WHAT THE CENTRAL POINT WILL BE FOR THE EMBASSY TO LINK INTO FOR THESE PURPOSES. ACCORDING TOO THE MINISTER WHAT THEY ARE CONTEMPLATING IS A SINGLE COMMAND FOR NARCOTICS ENFORCEMENT (COMANDO UNICO) PROBABLY UNDER THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. THIS WOULD NOT RPT NOT MEAN THAT THE MILITARY WOULD REPLACE THE DAS, F-2, ETC., BUT THAT A MILITARY OFFICER OR COMMAND WOULD TAKE DIRECTION OF AND UTILIZE THE OTHER SERVICES (AND THE MILITARY) AS A UNIFIED COMMAND--IN SHORT, SOMETHING LIKE THE MEXICAN PATTERN. THIS COMANDO UNICO WOULD ALSO BE THE CENTRAL POINT FOR DISCUSSION AND NEGOTIATION WITH US AS TO EQUIPMENT NEEDS, ETC.

3. THE GOC'S DECISION--OR ITS DELAY IN DECIDING--ON HOW BETTER TO ORGANIZE AND COORDINATE ITS DRUG ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS IN THE KEY FACTOR IN OUR PLANNING FOR ON-GOING NARCOTICS CONTROL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS. THE AMBASSADOR HAS STRESSED TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE THAT WE WOULD BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT NEEDS IN IMPLEMENTATION OF PRESIDENT LOPEZ' DISCUSSIONS IN WASHINGTON AS SOON AS THE GOC TELLS US WHICH OFFICIAL(S) ARE TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR COORDINATING NARCOTICS OPERATIONS. WE HAVE ALSO POINTED OUT THAT WE COULD CONTINUE TO WORK INDIVIDUALLY WITH FOUR DIFFERENT GOC AGENCIES, BUT THAT WE WOULD BE MORE EFFICIENT IN EXTENDING DRUG CONTROL AID OF EVERY SORT IF THE GOC ENTITIES WERE COORDINATED AND STRATEGIC PLANNING IMPROVED.

4. WHAT IS CLEAR FROM OUR TALKS IS THAT THE GOC UP TO THE HIGHEST LEVEL BELIEVES THAT IT HAS A FIRM US COMMITMENT TO PROVIDE SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED COOPERATION AND EQUIPMENT HELP, NOT ONLY JUST HELICOPTERS ALTHOUGH SPECIFICALLY HELICOPTERS, BUT IN GENERAL. ALL OFFICIALS AND MINISTERS, HOWEVER, ARE RATIONAL ABOUT THIS UNDERSTANDING AND ACCEPT THAT THERE SHOULD BE RATIONAL JUSTIFICATION FOR ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT; THEY UNDERSTAND THAT PLANS AND REQUIREMENTS SHOULD FIRST BE WORKED OUT AND, THEN, THE QUESTION OF WHAT KIND OF EQUIPMENT WILL BE NEEDED TO IMPLEMENT THE PROGRAM. IT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD, HOWEVER, THAT FOR THE GOC THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER WE WILL GIVE HELICOPTERS (OR ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE) BUT HOW MANY, WHAT KIND, UNDER WHAT CONDITIONS, ETC. FOR THE MINISTERS INVOLVED THEREFORE THEY UNDERSTAND THAT FUTURE DISCUSSIONS WITH US WILL TURN MAINLY ON TECHNICAL DISCUSSIONS OF

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WHAT KIND OF AID CAN BEST BACKSTOP AND IMPLEMENT THEIR INTENTION TO MOUNT AN INCREASED, COORDINATED ENFORCEMENT PROGRAM.

5. INTELLIGENCE: IN OUR VIEW, THE QUESTION OF IMPROVED INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES IS AT PRESENT DEPENDENT UPON BETTER GOC INTERNAL COORDINATION OF ITS DRUG EFFORT. THE TWO QUESTIONS ARE, OF COURSE, LINKED. AT PRESENT DEA AND THE INDIVIDUAL GOC SERVICES --PARTICULARLY F-2--CAN GENERATE AMPLE OPERATIONAL INTELLIGENCE.

WHAT IS LACKING IS SUSTAINED, LONG-TERM ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE. IF AND WHEN THE GOC SETS UP A CENTRAL COORDINATING AUTHORITY FOR NARCOTICS INTERDICTION, WE PLAN TO WORK WITH THIS AUTHORITY TO CREATE A TEAM OF ANALYSTS DRAWN FROM VARIOUS AGENCIES TO SUPPLY FINISHED OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE TO ALL ENFORCEMENT SERVICES. WE WOULD NOT, HOWEVER, ENVISAGE WORKING ON SUCH A PROJECT WITH THREE OR FOUR INDIVIDUAL AGENCIES. THUS, THE QUESTION OF GOC INTERNAL ORGANIZATION AND BETTER COORDINATION IS, TO US, BASIC TO IMPROVED INTELLIGENCE OPERATIONS, AS WELL AS TO BETTER ENFORCEMENT IN GENERAL.

6. NEED FOR HELICOPTERS: IN CONSIDERING THE USE OF HELICOPTERS AS PART OF THE TOTAL COLOMBIAN DRUG CONTROL EFFORT, OPERATION KITCHEN AND OTHER RECENT COOPERATIVE EFFORTS HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTIVE. TWICE DURING THE KITCHEN EXERCISE, DEA AND F-2 HAVE HAD URGENT NEED FOR HELICOPTERS TO REACH INACCESSABLE AREAS WHERE NO FIXED-WING LANDING STRIPS EXIST. IN THE ABOVE CASES, F-2 AND DEA EFFORTS TO RENT OR BORROW COMMERCIAL OR MILITARY HELICOPTERS WERE UNSUCCESSFUL. DEA ALSO ABANDONED TWO OTHER RECENT BILATERAL EFFORTS BECAUSE NO HELICOPTERS WERE AVAILABLE. BOTH THESE PLANNED OPERATIONS INVOLVED LANDING HEAVILY ARMED POLICE OR TROOPS ON OR NEAR ISOLATED CLANDESTINE AIRSTRIPS USED BY DRUG TRAFFICKERS. THE USE OF FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT WHICH WOULD HAVE TO LAND DIRECTLY AT SUSPECTED SITE WAS JUDGED UNWISE BECAUSE THE TRAFFICKERS WERE HEAVILY ARMED WITH AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. IN ALL FOUR CASES CITED ABOVE, OVERLAND TRANSIT WAS IMPRACTICAL BECAUSE THE SITES IN QUESTION LAY FAR FROM MOTORABLE HIGHWAYS OR TRACKS. MOREOVER, THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE WOULD INEVITABLY HAVE BEEN LOST EVEN IF VEHICLES COULD HAVE GOTTEN THROUGH TO THE TARGET AREA.

7. IN SUM, THE MISSION CONSIDERS HELICOPTERS ESSENTIAL FOR FAST INTERVENTION OPERATIONS AIMED AT ISOLATED CLANDESTINE LABS, AIRFIELDS AND OTHER INSTALLATIONS USED BY COLOMBIAN DRUG TRAFFICKERS.
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ERS AND LOCATED IN REMOTE AREAS OF THE COUNTRY WHERE FIXED-WING AIRCRAFT CANNOT LAND, AND WHERE QUICK OVERLAND ACCESS IS DIFFICULT OR IMPOSSIBLE.

8. USE AND MAINTENANCE: AFTER CAREFUL CONSIDERATION, OUR TENTATIVE RECOMMENDATION FOR PLANNING PURPOSES IS FOR TWO BELL TYPE 212 HELICOPTERS. MILITARY VERSION OF THIS HELICOPTER WOULD BE PREFERABLE. COLOMBIAN AIR FORCE HAS BELL UH-1B AND UH-1H HELICOPTERS IN INVENTORY AND CAN SUPPLY BOTH TRAINED PILOTS AND MECHANICS. HELICOPTERS SHOULD BE SUPPLIED WITH 10 TO 15 PERCENT SPARE PARTS. THOUGH FOR REASONS OUTLINED ABOVE, WE HAVE NOT YET DISCUSSED THIS WITH GOC, WE BELIEVE THAT HELICOPTER PROJECT AGREEMENT SHOULD PREFERABLY BE WRITTEN TO GIVE COLOMBIAN AIR FORCE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SUPPLYING PILOTS AND MAINTENANCE PERSONNEL, WITH OPERATING COSTS COVERED BY AGENCY USING COPTERS FOR NARCOTICS

OPERATIONS. AGREEMENT WOULD ALSO SPECIFY YET TO BE NAMED GOC NARCOTICS COORDINATOR OR OTHER CENTRAL POINT AS AUTHORITY CONTROLLING USE OF COPTERS EXCLUSIVELY FOR NARCOTICS INTERDICTION. EACH ENFORCEMENT AGENCY WOULD HAVE EQUAL ACCESS TO COPTERS FOR ITS NARCOTICS OPERATIONS.

9. WE RECOMMEND THAT AMBASSADOR VANCE BE PREPARED TO DISCUSS ALL ABOVE WITH GOC OFFICIALS DURING HIS JANUARY VISIT TO BOGOTA. BECAUSE WE ARE OBVIOUSLY NOT PREPARED TO SUPPLY HELICOPTERS OR OTHER SUCH HIGH-COST EQUIPMENT TO EACH INDIVIDUAL GOC DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY, WE BELIEVE AMBASSADOR VANCE AND THE MISSION CAN USE THIS ISSUE TO ENCOURAGE GOC TO ACHIEVE BETTER COORDINATION AMONG COMPETING POLICE SERVICES.
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